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- NEWS RELEASE -

## **BYSIEWICZ CLOSES LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

SECRETARY OF THE STATE HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESS IN EXPANDING VOTING  
RIGHTS AND HEALTH CARE ACCESS – DECRIES LACK OF ACTION ON ETHICS,  
VOTER PRIVACY,

**HARTFORD:** Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz has officially closed the 2008 legislative session. In doing so, Sec. Bysiewicz used the occasion to reflect on several successes and failures of the tumultuous legislative session that effect issues of concern to Secretary Bysiewicz – both in terms of voter registration and election security, and the interests of businesses in Connecticut, all of whom must register with the Secretary of the State’s office.

### **H.B. No. 5536, An Act Establishing the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership**

Secretary Bysiewicz is thrilled the Connecticut State Senate and House passed H.B. No. 5536, An Act Establishing the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership.

Bysiewicz is calling on Governor M. Jodi Rell to immediately sign into the bill into law. H.B. 5536 aims to reduce health care costs to municipalities, small businesses (fewer than fifty employees) and not-for-profits by permitting them to voluntarily join the state employee insurance pool.

“It is no secret that in this time of economic uncertainty small businesses and municipalities are struggling with their bottom lines,” said Bysiewicz. “Communities

across Connecticut are begging for tax relief. By expanding the purchasing power of the state pool, we can save taxpayer dollars and drive down health care costs for the small business community that is responsible for more than 90% of all new jobs in our state. Lowering health care costs is good for the economy and is good for taxpayers.”

## **H.J #21**

State lawmakers gave passage to HJ-21, a Constitutional Amendment that would allow thousands of 17 year-olds to vote in a primary election, so long as they turn 18 before the general election. The measure will go to voters all over Connecticut in November of 2008 as a Constitutional question on the ballot.

“This measure will now open up the selection of our president to 10,000 new voters who are eager to become active participants in our political process,” said Bysiewicz. “In this time of economic hardship, war, and environmental peril, young people clearly want a say in the direction of this country; allowing them a head-start in becoming involved in civic life just makes sense and will go a long way in creating life-long voters.”

## **Ethics**

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz is extremely disappointed that Governor Rell and legislative leaders could not reach a compromise and pass an ethics reform package which includes revoking the pensions of public officials who commit corrupt acts while in office.

“We have been debating ethics reform for five years,” said Bysiewicz. “It is shameful that I must close the session without real ethics reform. The legislature had an opportunity to take action and restore the public’s trust in our elected officials and government by passing sweeping and comprehensive reform on all levels and in every branch of government. The people of Connecticut deserve better.”

Bysiewicz added, “Because of the inaction of our elected leaders, the next time a public official violates their oath of office and commits a serious breach of the public trust, taxpayers will still be stuck paying their pensions. A historic opportunity to right this wrong was missed yet again. But I will continue to fight for pension revocation.”

In December, Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal announced their joint plan to overhaul Connecticut’s ethics code for elected and public officials.

Their joint proposal focuses on 5 areas of reform:

- **Pension Revocation.** This law would revoke pension benefits of any state elected official or top appointee convicted of a crime related to their employment. This would include embezzlement, bribery, and fraud. Such a penalty would serve as a powerful deterrent to the people in power.

- **Municipal Code of Ethics.** This proposal will require all municipalities to either establish a code of ethics for municipal elected officials or adopt a model code of municipal ethics promulgated by the Office of State Ethics.
- **False Claims Act.** Penalize contractors who defraud the state and municipalities by filing false claims and work orders. Contractors who are found guilty of defrauding the state could be fined and removed from the pool of state contractors.
- **Judicial Reform.** This law would prevent the judicial branch from sealing court cases involving prominent businessmen, politicians, and judges from the public.
- **Permanent Legislative Committee on Ethics.** In addition to the Office of State Ethics, create a permanent bipartisan committee to hold accountable fellow members of the state legislature. The committee would have the power to investigate the conduct of members of the legislature, issue subpoenas, and recommend reprimand, censure or expulsion to the legislature.

#### **S.B. #444**

The House failed to pass critical safeguards to guarantee every voter's fundamental Constitutional right to vote privately and independently at the polls.

"After conducting hearings in every Congressional district in the state, it is clear Connecticut citizens want more privacy protections in place with our new optical scan voting system," said Bysiewicz. "I am preparing for a record turnout in November and it is critical that we provide local election officials with concrete guidance about how best to safeguard voter privacy. Voters in our state have a right to expect that we will protect their most fundamental civil right and this bill provides a good framework to do just that."

Among other provisions, SB #444 guarantees the following:

**(Voters zone of privacy)** Registrars of voters shall ensure that each voting booth is placed so that they are in plain view of all election officials and electors waiting to vote and so that there are at least three feet between each voting booth. Each voting booth shall be so placed so that no person outside the booth can determine how an individual voted.

**(Zone of privacy around voting machines)** The voting machine shall be placed at least three feet from any wall, partition or guardrail and at least four feet from the checkers' table. The registrars of voters shall place a guardrail or other marking device around such machine so as to prevent electors waiting in line from encroaching upon an elector who is submitting their ballot into the voting machine. Such guardrail or other marking device shall be placed at least three feet from the voting machine and shall be arranged in such a manner as to prevent voters from determining the votes cast on each ballot submitted to the machine.

**(Privacy sleeve)** The registrars of voters shall ensure that each ballot clerk offer every voter a privacy sleeve into which the ballot can be inserted so that the markings on the ballot cannot be seen or it may be placed in every voting booth for the elector's use. The voter shall not be required to accept a privacy sleeve.

SB #444 passed the Senate overwhelmingly on April 24, 2008 but failed to come up for a vote in House of Representatives.

The Legislature also failed to pass an Independent Audit Board to provide greater consistency in the way post election audits are conducted and would alleviate the burden of conducting the audits from local election officials.

Secretary Bysiewicz in her role as the state chief business registrar also expressed regret that the legislature due to budgetary deficits was unable to repeal the business entity tax.

“Connecticut businesses are clearly struggling to stay afloat as the national and state economy continues to see a major decline,” said Secretary Bysiewicz. “Small business owners and others continue to grapple with the costs of doing business given escalating energy prices, the credit crunch, and health care costs. We must commit ourselves to doing all we can to provide support to the business community to stem the tide.”

Created in 2002, the \$250 dollar tax is applied to all foreign and domestic limited liability companies, limited liability partnerships, limited partnerships, and S corporations that are required to file annual reports with the Secretary of the State. More than 118,000 businesses are subject to the tax. Eliminating the tax would save small business owners an estimated \$30 million.